

# CRUcial Times

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Editorial .....	1
From the President's Desk .....	2
An Introduction .....	3
Influence and Change .....	3
The Search for Meaning .....	4
Jottings .....	6
Leadership .....	7
The Power of One .....	7
Meeting Important Needs First .....	8
Empires and Communalities .....	9
A Cheerful Pessimist .....	10
Reflections from the Course Presenters .....	11

## CRU MISSION STATEMENT

To challenge ideas and practices which limit the lives of people with disabilities.

To inspire and encourage individuals and organisations to pursue better lives for people with disabilities.

## EDITORIAL

During July of this year, three-hundred-and-sixty registrants participated in two Brisbane events presented by Dr Wolf Wolfensberger and Ms Susan Thomas of the Training Institute for Human Service Planning and Change Agency in Syracuse. The events had a truly national and international flavour with participants attending from every Australian state and territory, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan. Community Resource Unit, along with Values In Action Association, co-hosted one of these events.

This edition of *CRUcial Times* is presented as a follow-up to the event *Moral and Conceptual Foundations of Human Services with Special Perspectives on Contemporary Realities*. With the assistance of contributors, we present some reflections and reactions to this eleven-day event. This is to enable the wide readership of *CRUcial Times* to know something of the event and to share in the learning of those who were able to attend some or all of the event. It is apparent from the contributions that the course analysed and discussed many issues of relevance to those who are seriously concerned about people with disabilities and other vulnerable people. If anyone would like to discuss any of the material raised by contributors, or hear about other related training opportunities, the staff or committee members of CRU and Values In Action Association will try to assist.

Wolfensberger's contribution to human services as an advocate, theorist, writer and teacher is well known. Over the past two decades his work, especially his theoretical work of "Normalisation" and "Social Role Valorisation", has underpinned many positive policy developments for the provision of services to people with disabilities. Similarly, his work in defining and shaping the social advocacy movement is unparalleled. These outstanding contributions have been recognised by his peers in the US where he has been nominated the person who has had the most influence on policy and practice in the disability field. But as many readers will know, Wolfensberger's career has not been without controversy. He is a strong critic of many contemporary fads in human services. His concern for, and documentation of, the numerous threats to the lives of people with disabilities and other devalued people is sobering, confronting, and is dismissed by many as hysterical. Similarly his rejection of, and documentation of, the damaging effects on devalued people by many technological and pharmaceutical "advances" has meant that many of his critics dismiss him as eccentric and out-of-touch with the real issues.

Wolfensberger's outstanding contributions to issues affecting people with disabilities was reason enough to think that people should have an opportunity to hear him directly, and the fact that he is a keen observer of contemporary realities (especially as they affect devalued people) suggested the importance of his being heard in Queensland. ►

One of CRU's roles in Queensland has been to support the development and reform of services so that they better serve people with disabilities to lead decent, dignified lives in the community. Another role has been to support the development of effective, strategic leadership which is both relevant and enduring. Knowing that Wolfensberger has much to offer on these matters, CRU made the decision to participate in the sponsorship of an event in which he and his colleagues were invited to address the moral and conceptual foundations of human services, placing special emphasis on contemporary realities.

Wolfensberger and his colleagues did what we asked of them. An enormous amount of material was presented and many hours of discussion ensued. As planned, course participants were oriented to conceptual "foundational" material about human needs, human services, and societal realities. Participants were also assisted to consider the moral basis of human services, and the crafting of their own moral basis for service. Tool-subjects for competent, practical functioning in human services included material on change, systems theory, powerful socio-behavioural technologies, leadership and power, decision theory, group functioning, the dynamics of organisations, and the nature of communality. The course also covered many contemporary developments, especially those that have a negative impact on vulnerable people. The final segment of the course focused on strategies for moral actors, particularly those who provide leadership.

The design of the course offered a rare opportunity to cover an outstanding amount of material over the relatively short period of eleven days. Some of the material is accessible in other forums but much of it is not. A synthesis and analysis of the moral and the practical is the hallmark of Wolfensberger's presentations. Certainly for CRU, it has given much food for thought. Even when finding oneself not agreeing entirely, there was always much to ponder. What Wolfensberger and Thomas emphasised most of all was the need to determine the basis for one's own actions, and to assume personal moral responsibility for them; a refreshing reminder in these times.

The contributions to this edition of *CRUcial Times* provide some insights and reflections on the benefits of the course. CRU wishes to thank Dr Wolfensberger, Susan Thomas, and other presenters, Values in Action Association, and all of the participants for having made this a truly memorable event. ■

Anne Cross



## From the President's Desk

Many people, including me, found the material presented in the eleven-day course challenging and confronting. The probing questions of the course could be classified in three broad categories: Why do we help others? How do we help others? Can we help others in a better way?

Many questions arose for me personally and on the third day of the course, I found myself thinking: Why am I here? Why are we all here? If we are going to take on board all the points that are being made, are we going to have to start again from scratch? Do we, or more specifically do I, really have the intestinal fortitude to confront our own actions and our motives for doing things?

These issues seemed so compelling that for a while I felt quite unsettled. Finally I came to the decision that somehow I had to address them as realistically and honestly as I could, because this was necessary to my journey of continual learning and ceaseless striving to be a "better-way" helper.

With the assistance of Dr Wolfensberger, his colleague Ms Susan Thomas, and other co-presenters, I was endeavouring to absorb the vast knowledge and wisdom they were so willing to share. I believe I was presented with the encouragement, motivation and the drive to keep on with my journey. I especially appreciated the unrelenting vigour and tenacity which Wolfensberger and Thomas applied to their analysis. Though it was hard going at times, I found such an approach very encouraging because there seems to be so much superficiality and glossing over of issues these days.

Was there a particular message for CRU in all of this? I think there was. The message is to keep on with what we have always tried to do. That is, to keep on stripping away the layers of society in order to expose the forces which impact on those of us with a disability. Through vigorous critique, we must endeavour to understand and examine our belief systems because these belief systems drive our work practices and attitudes towards people generally, but of course, particularly those with a disability. ■

Mike Duggan

# An Introduction...

In the course, *Conceptual and Moral Foundations of Human Services with Special Perspectives on Contemporary Realities*, Professor Wolfensberger uses information from many fields including psychology, economics, history, management, and human services. He has analysed the information from a largely sociological approach to present a comprehensive overview of the difficulties and dysfunctions facing human service provision in the modern world.

More importantly, the analysis goes beyond a science of society, social institutions, and social relationships because Professor Wolfensberger knows that we need more than information and

knowledge. In order for us to know how we should act when we try to serve people, our own personal philosophies and beliefs are crucial. To this end, the course places considerable emphasis on the notions of "personalism", "act validity" and "personal voluntary engagement", thus encouraging participants to examine their own motivations.

In an age where there is increasing emphasis on scientific gathering of information, this course stands out as a refreshing, scholarly synthesis of knowledge which the world has at its fingertips but which it largely ignores or rejects. ■

*Greg Mackay*

## ∞ Influence and Change ∞

*Ros Cawte relates how the course influenced her and how she, in turn, has been able to influence others.*

I am employed as a transition-worker in a community based, non-profit organisation which provides employment, accommodation and community access for people with intellectual disabilities. The organisation is at present in the midst of change, however, many members of the organisation still hold tightly to outdated belief systems. For me, the struggle for positive change has been a long one with progress marked by one step forward and two steps backwards.

To try to describe my experience, I will use a metaphor. I imagine myself alone on a raft in rough seas. I am on the edge of the raft, continually pulling people on board. I know that if I stay at the edge, I will eventually be pulled into the sea and drowned, so occasionally I go to the centre of the raft where I hold onto the mast in order to regain my strength. For me, the Wolfensberger course was that mast, renewing my personal strength and challenging me as a worker.

In my organisation, there has been one section which I have been unable to influence over time, but on my return from the course, I was asked to present an overview of the event to workers in that section. The task was not easy but it was a wonderful chance to try to influence the

group. One of the greatest challenges in the course was to further explore my own frame-of-reference for my work, and I attempted to challenge the other workers in a similar way.

In my introduction to the other members of staff, I spoke of the devaluation and wounding of people in our society. I also encouraged them to make the distinction between individual needs and organisational needs. I said that if we examine the work we do, and divide that work into direct services (the hands-on work) and indirect services (internal agency control, program support functions etc), workers would be able to question whether or not the service is really meeting the individual needs of service recipients. I explained that although I believe that in my own position I am meeting people's needs to a large extent, there are also many requirements of me such as Individual Program Plans as set out in government standards, which are not direct service. For those workers to whom I spoke, less than one quarter of their work is actually spent in meeting individual needs, as opposed to organisational needs, and I encouraged them to see these distinctions.

I also spoke about that part of the course which dealt with the intrinsic and absolute value of

the human person. Dr Wolfensberger stresses that we not only have "animal" make-up, but we also have a spiritual value which lends dignity and value that goes far beyond our animal make-up. One is born with it. It cannot be taken away, earned, or bestowed on a person. Everyone, he stresses, has it from the moment of conception. It is the essence of being human.

This is a very challenging idea and holds enormous ethical implications. In believing this, one begins to question other beliefs that might be held on issues such as abortion, euthanasia, the commodification of body-parts and so on. Wolfensberger's message was "be good, do good, as anything else would imply negative value".

The importance of individual, personal, moral responsibility for doing the right thing was strongly stressed. Nothing that is done by governments or organisations will absolve us from responsibility, even if those around us say that the right thing is not possible. Human services often enact a devaluation of those whom they serve, therefore individuals in those services need to assume personal responsibility. Dr Wolfensberger emphasised that this is not easy to do and may even cause a person to be placed on the outer edge of an organisation. I stressed to the group, however, that change starts with the individual.

I also spoke about another segment of the course that had impacted on me personally. This was an examination of the ideologies or belief systems of the modern world. While people's minds and hearts are rejecting traditional religious beliefs which have had a moral base, these beliefs are not being replaced by moral alternatives. If the moral base disappears from our belief systems we will be left with beliefs that endorse an individualistic pursuit of "what I want" and "what I hold true", rejecting the needs of others.

These topics were the main focus of my talk to other workers in my organisation. The subject matter of the course had been timely. With some changes already occurring in my organisation, and some staff members beginning to question the work they do, I have managed to raise even further questions in the minds of some. After three years of unsuccessfully trying to present some training sessions to this group of workers, I have since been invited back for further presentations and training and I will incorporate teachings from the course as a firm foundation on which to try to meet the needs of others. ■

# The Search for Meaning

*In this article about human suffering Yvonne Donnan's use of direct quotes from Wolfensberger gives readers a sense of the man and his message.*

For eleven stimulating and challenging days I was engaged in listening to Wolfensberger's articulation of such topics as: a cogent interdependent metaphysical system based on universal laws, both natural and human; the typical evolutionary direction of human services; moral absolutes; acts of personalism; the increasing complexity of contemporary social systems; the nature of change agency; and the nature of human suffering.

What could I do as one human service worker in the face of all this? How could I possibly internalise these concepts and "act with validity" in the "water that human service workers have been given to swim in"? Despair seems easier than acting in a world where "part of our problem is that we have a surplus of simple answers and a shortage of simple problems". How much harm do we cause when public and quasi-public "empires" are "ruthlessly tracking their money rather than tracking their clients"? Is there room to act with "personal, moral responsibility and direct engagement" when Wolfensberger has clearly demonstrated the "intrinsic limitations of paid relationships in meeting the needs of people"?

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*While human suffering, in its many forms, is an inevitable part of the human condition and is never good, some good may grow from it.*

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While I am still grappling with the challenges inherent in these complex issues, it took only two days of being back with people who use the Day Service where I am employed to really begin to understand the significance of

Wolfensberger's exploration of the issue of suffering in the lives of all people. While human suffering, in its many forms, is an inevitable part of the human condition and is never good, some good may grow from it. We need only to look to our own lives and those around us to see suffering in such events as the break-up of a marriage, a life-threatening illness, an unexpected or accidental death, or in overwhelming experiences of fear, shame, loneliness or rejection. I have a cousin who is dying of cancer, a dear friend facing surgery for cancer, and a family member who has struggled with severe eating disorders for many years and yet I can't fix any of their sufferings.

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*I am more acutely aware of the power that lies in direct acts of personalism and engagement, and the significance of mutuality in all areas of our lives.*

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Wolfensberger, however, made it clear that our responses may "not always be about finding a way out, but finding meaning". I can "walk with the person even if it doesn't lift the suffering". In the face of the most intractable, tragic situations the experience of "a powerful social presence in people's lives can be very profound". As with some of the individual people with whom I work, I know that it is not easy for someone to find meaning in their suffering when filled with fear of such things as chronic pain, or of seeing oneself lose skills and vitality, or of further wounding and vulnerability, of abandonment by family and friends, or most of all, fear of dying. These fears may find expression in demands that we, as human service workers, fix this or that problem until the people attempting to support the person feel they can no longer meet their cries for help. Everyone becomes exhausted and discouraged and the individual's fears grow even more overwhelming. As Wolfensberger points out, "real life can be so messy and sometimes we cannot fix things".

With these thoughts in mind, I believed the time had come to act in a direct, personal way with someone who demanded that everyone

around them fix things. These demands had reached such an agitated, fever pitch that they were harming themselves and alienating others. Those things which could actually be fixed or alleviated were already being attended to by a wide range of service workers. It now seemed time to support the person to look at themselves, particularly when they had the ability and insight to do so.

The course module on suffering helped me to individualise how I might try to walk with this person and engage them in an attempt to find meaning in their own suffering and fears. I hoped to assist the person to understand suffering in the lives of all of us, at the same time that I would validate and acknowledge their past wounding and their present pain and fear. The journey to find meaning in suffering is not a fix in itself but in this case it was the beginning of a personal journey for someone who was very anguished. The person has since said that it is as if something had broken inside them and that the nights are no longer filled with such dread, and sleep comes more easily. Demands have become requests for support, and more trust is being shown in others.

After attending the course, I am more acutely aware of the power that lies in direct acts of personalism and engagement, and the significance of mutuality in all areas of our lives. In these interconnected acts we begin to tap the truths of good or bad in the human condition and to not be afraid of what we may see or feel. I will leave readers with some of Wolfensberger's own thoughts on happiness: "If I reconcile myself to the fact that there will be suffering in my life till the day I die, I will be a much happier person". ■

*Committee Members 1996/97*

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# Jottings



Mary Rohde tells how the course has impacted on her own work with people who have intellectual disabilities

So much was said during the course in July that it is very difficult to review it in any but general terms. The deep truths contained in the messages helped to make more sense of many things. However, now that they do make more sense, the burden placed upon the individual to act, or to challenge something, can feel overwhelming.

As I sat in the lecture theatre at Griffith University, I often had the feeling that "it's all too much" and wondered what I could take home with me that I could hang on to when the "empires" that surround all of us try to exert their power. I decided that in order to deal with the immensity of the task I would make what I call "back-page jottings" where I try to capture something which has great significance for me. These are some of those significant messages:

- *Human service workers lust after the quick-fix or the new craze, and in the process may disregard tried-and-true and valid strategies.*
- *A tyranny of small decisions is evident in modern human services rather than a universal moral direction.*
- *Start with protecting one person in one way.*
- *There is value in celebration. The people we share life with are precious and so are the moments we share with them. Together we experience hardship and pain, and together we need to share our joy and our fun, to applaud the positive and reaffirm one another.*
- *Take what you hear and test it out against your experience when you leave here.*

I felt I was able to test many of these ideas against my experience long before I left the course and knew that they were valid, but the problem remained as to how I could challenge such things as the many forms of rejection that still surround the people for whom I work.

I asked myself: what can one person do when so many of these people are rejected even

within a service system which was created to serve them? Their rejection has been so crushing and so sustained that they have few of their natural supports left.

The answers for me were in my jottings. I have always believed that one person can make a difference and have attempted to live this out, but since July I have done this with renewed vigour in the following ways with some co-workers:

- My work group and I have ignored some quick-fixes and have gone the long, hard route of trying to identify and deal with the cause of anguish.
- We have found that we do not always need to bow to the tyranny of small decisions or inflexible attitudes. These can be challenged, ignored, circumvented or even laughed at.
- We have stood shoulder to shoulder with some people who were having their rights trampled on, and who, in the face of more powerful people, did not know how to respond to such treatment in any other way than to avert their eyes and say "I'm sorry. I'm sorry". Now some of those powerful people are doing the apologising themselves.

And finally, we have celebrated. As Dr Wolfensberger said, the people we share life with are precious and so are the moments we share with them. When we celebrate as a group some are "staff" and some are "clients" but over pizza and red wine on a Friday after work, or on a holiday together at the Coast, no one is conscious of the difference. We laugh, and we embrace, and offer some help to those whose life experiences haven't run to these new things. What do we celebrate? Anything and everything; you don't need an achievement or event to celebrate, you can just celebrate the sheer enjoyment of each other's company. For people who have been devalued and despised, life has been too grim for too long. Celebration is a way of sharing-the-moment and reaffirming the many things we have in common with one another. ■



Rainer Parsons

The difficulty of writing one's reflections following eleven days of lectures is knowing where to start and where to finish. For the purpose of this article, I have decided to focus on the teaching modules which dealt with leadership as this topic made a strong impression on me and is relevant to my work.

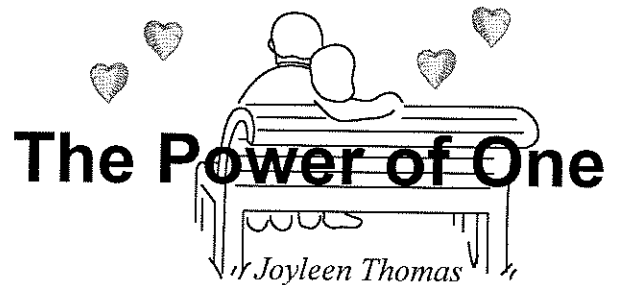
I am currently employed in what many people would regard as a leadership role. My own particular style of leadership is still evolving and the presentations by Wolfensberger on this topic have further grounded my ideals and aspirations in a framework which has meaning and relevance for me.

The course stressed that people are influenced by those around them and that environments can be set up to either foster or inhibit learning. This concept, I believe, also relates to leadership because organisational cultures and environments are influenced by the leaders of the organisation.

Leadership in human services seems balanced on a knife edge because leaders tend to possess or aspire to powers that are imperial in their nature. Where and how leaders use their powers has an impact on services as a whole. From my understanding of the course content, it is clear that leaders need to have a strong sense of vision and the ability to formulate goals and policies that are embedded in that vision. Leaders also need to be able to deal with complexity and to have the willingness to be around for the long haul. They also need to be flexible, to allow for the unknown, and to have alternatives and back-up in place.

It is important to remember that effective leadership is an all-or-nothing affair and comes at a personal cost. Baseline activities can consume at least thirty hours each week and this can have implications for personal relationships outside the organisation.

Some of the more important aspects of leadership are the ability to inspire others, to draw on relationships, and to build social influences. Strong leaders also need to know when to compromise, when to use rules, and when not to rely on rules. On a more practical level, leaders should be able to set targets, to track people, and to deputise. Leaders must have a positive reputation, moral and practical judgement, and work within high order principles. The single biggest contributor to success is strong leadership. I hope these reflections give some insight into what I believe was a significant and powerful event for human service workers and leaders. ■



*This story demonstrates that while we may not be able to change empires, the power of one person's love can make a vast difference in the life of a vulnerable person.*

Over the period of eleven days we heard a great deal about a dysfunctional society and the wounding of vulnerable people, much of which occurs through human service intervention. We heard about building empires and conflicts of interest, which even in the best run services, mean that the person is rarely seen as the main focus. So I asked myself: what will keep me honest and sustain me as I return to work? I think the following story might hold some of the answers. For me, it is people like Jim and Lil who make the difference.

Lil is ninety-five and Jim is ninety. They have been married for seventy-three years. When I first met them, at their home, Jim showed me a photograph of Lil taken just before they were married. He said, "She's beautiful isn't she? She was beautiful then and she's beautiful now. Would you like to meet her?" Jim led the way into the bedroom. He tapped Lil on the shoulder and spoke a few gentle words and Lil smiled warmly at him. He said "Lil does not say much these days" but their expression to each other said it all.

Jim had often been told by health professionals that he was too old to care for Lil and that she would be better off in a nursing home. Lil and Jim were not certain this was true, but were pressured into agreeing. According to Jim, although the staff at the nursing home were very nice, they did not have the time or the inclination to get to know Lil's likes and dislikes, or to attend to them. For example, she liked to wear a special dress on Sundays when her son visited. She did not like her tea luke warm, and so on. The greatest indignities of all were the occasions when Lil would call a nurse, and half an hour later when someone responded, Lil was described as "incontinent". Jim was

outraged by such an indignity and decided that this treatment was not good enough for Lil. With much opposition from the nursing home, he decided to take Lil home, called an ambulance and took Lil to a large public hospital for a health-check, where doctors agreed that Lil was well enough to go home with him.

This wonderful story of love and devotion has seen many obstacles and Jim speaks about how he needs to safeguard Lil's well-being. For example, a nurse called on them to authorise the Nursing Care benefit. She thought that Jim was too old to care for Lil, but he suggested that the nurse leave the house as he had a cup of tea going cold, and better things to do. Just to be sure that Lil was okay, he called Lil's doctor who assured Jim that he was doing a great job. Jim says, "This young fellow is not just about medicine; he cares". The doctor continues to be one of the greatest allies of the couple and supports their vision of staying together. However, Jim does not take any risks and always seeks medical treatment for himself at a different clinic because he does not want any judgements made about his own health to affect the perceptions of others regarding his ability to care for Lil.

On one occasion when I visited Lil in hospital, I was told by staff that Lil was "a difficult Alzheimer's". I tactfully suggested that Jim might be able to provide some insights into caring for Lil, only to be told, "We are all trained professionals and experts in the field".

Jim's presence and actions make all the difference to Lil's life. The love Jim holds for Lil has transformed her experience from "difficult patient" to "cherished wife". Although many people may be unable to match the devotion shown by Jim, love and care can radically change the experience of a vulnerable person. Jim recently asked me about staff training as he knew I had attended a workshop. He cautioned me that programs and rigid routines are not the way to go. "Lass, it's all about the person, and it's the loving and caring that counts", he said.

The words of Susan Thomas came back to me. During the course she said, "People's ties to each other and sense of place should be supported. All humans should be helped to be loved and to be loving, for their own good." ■

## MEETING IMPORTANT NEEDS FIRST

*From rural Queensland Jeanelle Horn tells of the clarity which the course has brought to some important aspects of her work.*

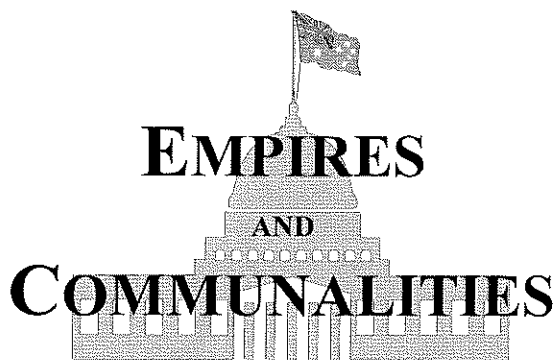
From the first day, the Wolfensberger team had me alert and engrossed. One topic of the presentation which immediately gained my attention, however, was the analysis of services and their involvement in our lives, as well as the loss of a humanitarian outlook in helping one another in voluntary, spontaneous ways. Many things became clearer to me, especially as they related to my own work. The course highlighted for me the fact that there might be any number of services involved in assisting people, but if the major focus of the service is its financial arrangements then their outcomes will fall short of assisting the very people they are intended to help.

For example, we have a young woman registered with our service who comes from a dysfunctional family, has suffered many types of abuse, and has a mild intellectual and psychiatric disability. Numerous services have come in and out of her life without much success. She has utilised our service because she feels that we assist her more than any other service she has experienced even though we are primarily an employment service.

Our service is now focusing on assisting the young woman to find a safe environment where she has an opportunity to meet people who have had similar experiences. We are also trying to introduce her to people and groups in whom she has shown interest, with the result that she has now developed some caring, unpaid relationships and this has brought her confidence and strength. This young woman is now focusing on trying to address many devastating issues in her life since she feels she is no longer so alone.

We have come to recognise a situation where some people come into our service wanting assistance to gain employment, but after meeting with them a few times we find they are virtually calling out for someone to show an interest in them as well as confidence in their potential. ■





# EMPIRES AND COMMUNALITIES

*Anthony Gwyther contrasts empires and communalities and identifies a modern global empire.*

I am currently engaged in a writing project examining the relationship between the early Roman Empire and a group of communalities in the Roman province of Asia as seen in the *Book of Revelation*, an early Christian text. During their eleven-day course, Wolf Wolfensberger and Susan Thomas helped me to clarify my understanding of how empires and communalities relate to each other.

It is instructive that communalities which stand in contradiction to empires have been in existence as long as empires themselves. Communalities are groups of people living together and sharing their lives. Stories such as those found in the *Book of Revelation* inspired people living in communalities in the Roman Empire, and can be used to sustain those of us today who would like to see ourselves operating outside imperial circles.

Wolfensberger and Thomas described how an empire presents four big messages about itself: that the empire is benign; that it possesses exclusivity; that it is in sovereign control of affairs; and that it is eternal. Those messages can clearly be seen in *Revelation's* depiction of the Roman Empire.

I would like to draw attention to a modern, powerful empire which we know as "the global economy". I would argue that this new economic order has the characteristics of other empires and spreads the same four major messages about itself. While claiming to be benign, there is the refusal to acknowledge that poverty and death are by-products of its operations. The global economy claims exclusivity when it is argued that the market is the only mechanism which can successfully regulate human affairs. The global economy is claiming to be in sovereign control of events when we are told to place our trust in its international political, financial, and trade mechanisms. The global economy is claiming eternity when there is a refusal to admit that alternatives can, and do, exist.

In the modern world, the daily lives of individuals and societies are increasingly controlled via a process of the commodification of almost every type of human relationship and activity. This process has encroached on the most basic human modes of "being" and "doing", including intimacy, labour, learning, child-rearing, care of the aged and infirm, and recreation.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution all these activities were typically carried out in the home or village. They were small in scale, usually performed at a subsistence level, and were tailored to the needs of those who engaged in them. Now, each of these activities is increasingly being contracted to third parties with a monetary value placed on them.

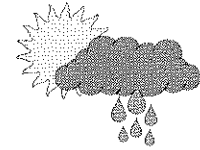
At the end of the twentieth century, the rules of market economics have become the rules which govern almost all social relations. "Citizens" become "consumers" and "workers" become "human resources", while the serving of others becomes an "industry" (e.g. the aged-care industry). These market rules are not designed to enhance the dignity of the person, but to relegate the person to a position of being a unit of production and/or a consumer of its outputs. These developments offer little to the majority of the world's people. They offer even less to people who are devalued and vulnerable, even when they may be living in an affluent society. The empire of global capital has no need for those who can make neither a contribution to the production of commodities, nor act as voracious consumers of its outputs.

The course itself proposed a radical response to the problem of some people finding themselves outside the door of the global economy without a ticket. The answer is not to break down the door, but to build a more desirable venue in communalities. Communalities are voluntary groupings of people who come together around a vision or ideal of life. Communalities vary in form and size, but they are based on a shared value system which may be philosophical, religious or political in nature. They usually involve people living together or in close proximity to each other, and they typically demand more commitment than most other forms of human relatedness.

These groupings are best placed to facilitate alliances between valued and devalued people. Some of the reasons for this are that while empires think in terms of slots and places, communalities value people and their gifts. Empires create social distance via stratification and segregation, while communalities reduce distance via acceptance of vulnerability and a minimisation of any differences in status. Empires operate via bureaucracy and generalisation, while communalities know people as they are, and are therefore able to respond face-to-face.

The *Book of Revelation* envisions a world where the Roman Empire has come crashing down. In its place is a non-imperial community committed to non-imperial practice. It is a community that does not idolise commodity or cult, where there is no exploitation or death-making, and there is no promotion of empire by either seduction or coercion. We who live in imperial times can take hope from stories such as these. ■

# A Cheerful Pessimist



*Margaret Schroder relates how two different systems are impacting on her life and how the course has given her greater insight into each of them.*

I am a person with a significant disability. Dr. Wolfensberger would describe me as "handicapped" but I prefer the dignity of putting my personhood first and I'm also comfortable with the term "disability". Although the results of a medical mishap in my babyhood have shaped my life circumstances, they have not ruled my life. There are many aspects of my personhood that are unrelated to my disability. But terminology is one of the very few points on which I disagree with Dr Wolfensberger, and I found the eleven-day course an inspiring event.

The course described and explained some of the "universal truths" of human services and some of these became crystal clear as I reflected on my own life experiences with human services. It seems that no matter how good the intentions may be, most human endeavours will fail eventually due to multiple and complex reasons. For many years I have been acutely aware that contemporary human services, and society in general, have failed not only to identify my real needs but also to meet them. From an early age, my life became embedded in a human service system which had evolved from being a comparatively small, informal, voluntary service to one that is a large, bureaucratic, complex, life-controlling system. The service seems to have forgotten its reason for existing, and has lost sight of the value base on which it was originally founded.

Wolfensberger spoke a great deal about the evolution of systems, and how we have come to rely so much on complex solutions to what may, in fact, be simple problems. For example, many people are referred to counselling when all they may need is someone who shows empathy. It isn't difficult to observe that the more complex our human service systems become, the less they seem able to respond to the real needs of people. In fact, many human services actually perpetuate the wounding of people with disabilities. One example for me would be the difficulty I find in coping with the passing parade of my support

workers. I often experience these broken relationships as rejection.

At the time that I attended the Wolfensberger course, I was also experiencing a traumatic period of employment in a government department. Wolfensberger's description of government bureaucracies rang loud and clear for me. These are complex systems which insidiously control not only those people who work for them, but also the lives of those people who receive services from them. On the surface they appear benevolent, but it only takes a little probing to find that these systems are self-perpetuating and preoccupied with their own power and control mechanisms.

I wondered how I would ever return to work after the course, and not be so deeply affected by the daily wounding and devaluation I experience there. As I reflected on the learning from the course I came to realise that no single individual is to blame for the situation in which I find myself. Rather, individuals make up a system and they are merely playing out their expected roles.

Although an understanding of Wolfensberger's message sometimes makes things a little easier, my unhappiness at work has widespread ramifications for me, increasing my vulnerability. My own anxiety upsets my mother and family. My support workers are also significantly affected in seeing my daily distress and because of the emotional pressure on them, I am often in a situation where I am fearful of losing them and of facing more broken relationships.

I am still grappling with a number of difficulties, but as I reflect on the many things Wolfensberger said I am helped to observe at a deeper level what is happening around me, and have begun to see some things in a different light. At this stage I can only echo Wolfensberger's special song to us, "I am a cheerful pessimist" and to say that there is hope, but it's not where one would expect to find it. ■

# REFLECTIONS FROM THE COURSE PRESENTERS

*In this article, Wolf Wolfensberger & Susan Thomas tell us about their experience as the course creators and presenters.*

On July 8-18, 1997, we conducted a course entitled 'Conceptual & Moral Foundations in Human Services' at Griffith University in Brisbane. This event was sponsored by CRU and Values in Action. It is the longest single training event we have ever conducted. The idea for such an event was first suggested to us by one of our close associates, Darcy Miller Elks, after she returned from one of her trips to Australia. We thought about such a course for several years, mulling over in our minds what it might look like, what topics should be included, devising several proposed schedules and sequences of topics, and collecting thoughts, references, resources, etc. that we thought would be helpful for such a course. We were finally able to come to agreement about specifics with the sponsors, and then - approximately one year prior to the course - began to actually work on developing the course curriculum. For a typical event that we do, we estimate that we invest one full day's preparation time for every hour of presentation time in the event. Thus, for the Conceptual & Moral Foundations course, which had approximately eighty-five and a half class hours, we would spend over three months preparing. (We did take off Sundays, so worked 'only' six days a week on it for many months !)

After so much preparation, we were very much looking forward to conducting the course, but we also had much trepidation, since we had never done anything so long, and were not sure we could actually pull it off.



*Susan Thomas and Dr Wolf Wolfensberger*

To our great relief and delight, the course, in our opinion, went superbly. There were well over one hundred people in attendance from all parts of Australia, as well as from Japan, New Zealand, England and Canada. The participants managed the long and demanding hours very well, were always on time, (mostly) alert, and obviously concentrating very hard, following presentations that were sometimes very abstract or complex. The question and discussion sessions were always very challenging for us, and showed that participants had been paying close attention. Nor did participants appear to lag during the evening sessions, even when there was some social occasion scheduled. In fact, we felt that of all the many, many events we have conducted in many locales in the twenty four years that our Training Institute has been in existence, this was overall the best participant group ever.

We were also very pleased to be able to offer in one single event a body of material that we otherwise only get to present in bits and pieces and not necessarily well-connected to all the other material to which everything ought to be connected. Of course, we also included in this course new material that we had not presented before, and the material that we had presented before we extensively revised for this course. But it was the integrated presentation and interpretation that gave new meaning even to material that was already familiar to at least some participants, and to ourselves. ►

We were assisted in the conduct of the course by the following presenters: Peter Millier, John Armstrong, Errol Cocks, Anne Cross, and Beverley Funnell of Australia, and Oxana Metiuk and David Race of England. We could not have done the course without them. It was not only a relief to our voices (and the rest of our bodies) to have so much help presenting the material, but it also made the event more interesting for participants, and each speaker brought his or her own perspective and experiences to the presentations.

However, the course was also very hard work, for both ourselves and participants. So many people brought to the course their deepest concerns and the most painful experiences, their own sufferings and those of the people they serve, and people's willingness to admit these concerns and offer them for the learning benefit of all the other participants was one of the most important contributions made to and by the course. Nor did everyone agree with everything that we presented, but the level of discussion of disagreements, and of analysis of areas of agreement and disagreement, was very high, and contributed to clarifying issues for both participants and presenters.

The local organisation - though most of it done prior to the event, and much of it hidden from participants - was also very well done. This was no small task, given the length of days of the course, the number of participants and presenters, and the many different requirements of different people, many of whom travelled great distances to attend.

We are confident that the course has had a deep impact on participants, and will continue to do so, and we are hopeful that it will bear good fruit in the lives of the people that participants serve. Given how well the course went, we would look forward to an opportunity to do it again, but on the other hand, we would be a bit reluctant to do so because of a fear that it would never go so well again!

In any event, we are glad to have met so many people seriously concerned about the welfare of devalued people, and willing to commit themselves full-time for almost two weeks to an examination of very serious issues regarding service to such people. ■

## An Invitation

For those people who might be interested in some of the topics which have been raised in this publication, and in the material which was presented in the eleven-day event, CRU is able to provide access to relevant material through:

- library resources
- audio tapes
- courses and training programs

Please contact us for information on how you can access these resources.

Suite 5B/19 Lang Parade  
Auchenflower

Ph: (07) 3870 1022 Fax: (07) 3371 3842

e-mail: [cru@mailbox.uq.edu.au](mailto:cru@mailbox.uq.edu.au)

## EVERYONE IS WELCOME

**Join CRU to celebrate the year at our  
AGM on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> November 1997.**

6 pm - 7 pm Live music and light dinner  
7 pm - 8 pm AGM  
8 pm - 9:30 pm Party

At Suite 5B/19 Lang Parade, Auchenflower.

Ph: (07) 3870 1022 Fax: (07) 3371 3842

e-mail: [cru@mailbox.uq.edu.au](mailto:cru@mailbox.uq.edu.au)

RSVP: 18/11/97 - Silke Collisson

*A contribution towards expenses will be appreciated.*